

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TEL AVIV 3118

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, PDEV, PINT, IS
SUBJECT: THE MAKESHIFT SETTLEMENT POLICIES OF THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT

1. SUMMARY: (FOR THOSE WHO ARE LOST IN THE WILDERNESS OF RECENT ISRAELI SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY, HEREWITH IS AN EFFORT TO ENLIGHTEN THE BLIND AND UNBELIEVING.) THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT HAS NEVER REALLY HAD A COHERENT SETTLEMENT POLICY. STARTING FROM THE PHILOSOPHICAL POSITION THAT JEWS HAVE THE RIGHT TO SETTLE ANYWHERE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL, THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT IN TURN IMPLEMENTED ONE MAKESHIFT PLAN AFTER ANOTHER IN REACTION TO SHORT-TERM DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES. ABRUPT
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SHIFTS IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION WERE FURTHER CIMPLICATED BY THE HABIT OF RIVAL MINISTERS (WEIZMAN AND SHARON) OF ISSUING CONFLICTING INSTRUCTIONS, WITH EACH INTERPRETING AMBIGUOUS CABINET RESOLUTIONS AS HE PLEASED. EIGHT MONTHS OF TWISTS AND TURNS IN SETTLEMENT POLICIES HAVE LEFT MANY ISRAELI DOUBTING THE CREDIBILITY IF NOT THE EFFICACY OF THE BEGIN GOVERN-

MENT. THE VIEW THAT PREOCCUPATION WITH SETTLEMENTS HELPED WRECK THE PROSPECTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATION WITH EGYPT HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY HEARD. THIS PUBLIC CONCERN HAS FILTERED INTO THE CABINET, LIKUD AND NRP (IT WAS ALREADY STRONG IN THE DMC), AND AS A RESULT THE GOI HAS NOW INSTITUTED A THREE-WEEK FREEZE IN SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY UNTIL THE RETURN OF THE PRIME MINISTER FROM HIS TRIP TO WASHINGTON. THE CABINET WILL THEN REVIEW THE DECISION AND IT IS LIKELY THAT THE MOST EFFECTIVE AMMUNITION WEIZMAN AND MODERATE CABINET MINISTERS CAN USE TO MAINTAIN THE FREEZE IS THE PROSPECT OF A SPEEDY RESUMPTION IN DIRECT EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI TALKS. END SUMMARY

2. THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT HAS NEVER REALLY HAD A COHERENT SETTLEMENT POLICY. UNLIKE PREVIOUS LABOR GOVERNMENTS, FOR WHOM SETTLEMENT WAS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THEIR IDEOLOGY, THE LIKUD PARTIES (HERUT AND LIBERALS) HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY UNINVOLVED IN SETTLEMENT ACTIVITIES. MOST CABINET MINISTERS IN THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT APPROACHED THE SUBJECT FROM A PHILOSOPHICAL ("THE RIGHT OF JEWS TO SETTLE ANYWHERE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL") RATHER THAN PRACTICAL POINT OF VIEW. ONLY SHARON, DAYAN AND HURWITZ HAD ANY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH FARMING. PROCEEDING FROM THIS DOGMATIC BUT UNINFORMED POSITION, THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO SHARPLY

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CONFLICTING CURRENTS. IDEOLOGICAL TENETS, THE GOVERNMENT'S VOCAL RIGHT-WING CONSTITUENCY (ESPECIALLY GUSH EMUNIM AND THE COMPLETE LAND OF ISRAEL MOVEMENT), AND SHARON'S PERCEPTIONS OF ISRAELI SECURITY NEEDS ALL FAVORED ACCELERATED SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY. ON THE OTHER HAND, USG OPPOSITION TO SETTLEMENTS, DAYAN'S PROMISE TO PRESIDENT CARTER TO PLACE NEW SETTLEMENTS IN MILITARY CAMPS, AND THE CONSIDERATIONS ARISING FROM THE SADAT INITIATIVE SUGGESTED A RESTRICTING OF SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY. FURTHER COMPLICATING THIS DICHOTOMOUS CHOICE WAS THE HABIT OF RIVAL MINISTERS OF ISSUING CONFLICTING INSTRUCTIONS ON SETTLEMENT POLICY IMPLEMENTATION. ALL THESE FACTORS CONTRIBUTED OVER THE PAST EIGHT MONTHS TO WIDE FLUCTUATIONS IN GOI SETTLEMENT DECISION-MAKING AND POLICIES.

3. IDEOLOGY BEFORE POLICY. RIGHT AFTER THE ELECTION VICTORY OF THE LIKUD, BEGIN SEIZED UPON A CHOICE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS HIS INSTINCTUAL FEELINGS ON THE RIGHT OF JEWS TO SETTLE ANYWHERE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL. GOING TO QADUM, WHERE GUSH EMUNIM HAD SETTLED DESPITE LABOR GOVERNMENT OPPOSITION, BEGIN STATED THAT "THERFNIEAZEPM MDYWSV ELON MORES (THE NAME GIVEN BY THE GUSH TO

THIER SETTLEMENT), THERE WILL NOT BE A NEED FOR
A QADUM."

4. POLICY I -- "SETTLEMENTS IN THE PIPELINE." HOWEVER,
IT TOOK ALMOST THREE MONTHS FOR THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT
TO ORGANIZE ITSELF AND START PUTTING SOME PRACTICAL
CONTENT IN ITS REPEATEDLY AVOWED COMMITMENT TO SETTLE-
MENT. EARLY IN JULY TWO NAHALS, PREVIOUSLY APPROVED
BY THE LABOR GOVERNMENT, WERE ESTABLISHED AT REIYHAN
AND SALIT ON THE WEST BANK. IMMEDIATELY AFTER BEGIN'S
VISIT TO WASHINGTON LATE IN THE MONTH, THE MINISTERIAL
SETTLEMENT COMMITTEE ALSO LEGITIMIZED THE PREVIOUSLY
UNAUTHORIZED SETTLEMENTS OF WADUM, OFRA AND MA'ALE
ADUMIM. TWO NEW SETTLEMENTS WERE ALSO INAUGURATED
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IN THE SADOT BLOC. BEGIN VIEWED THE LEGITIMIZATION
OF THE THREE WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS AS A BIT OF UN-
FINISHED BUSINESS LEFT OVER FROM THE RABIN ADMINISTRATION.

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HE MADE A POINT OF REMARKING THAT "THE POSITION OF THIS GOVERNMENT DIFFERS FROM THE PREVIOUS ONE ON THIS MATTER. WE THINK THAT JEWS HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO BE IN QADUM." HOWEVER, THE LACK OF SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY BY THE NEW GOVERNMENT WAS ALREADY LEADING TO IMPATIENCE AND CRITICISM BY THE GUSH. BEGIN'S LEGITIMIZATION OF THE THREE SETTLEMENTS WAS THEREFORE NOT ONLY INTENDED TO REAFFIRM HIS IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS BUT ALSO TO PLACATE HIS VOCAL RIGHT-WING CONSTITUENCY BEFORE IT BECAME TOO RESTLESS. ON THE OTHER HAND, IN CONTACTS WITH THE EMBASSY THE GOI WAS MUCH LESS EAGER TO TAKE CREDIT FOR THESE DECISIONS. IN FACT, A HIGH MFA OFFICIAL APOLOGETICALLY
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STRESSED THAT THE SADOT SETTLEMENTS HAD BEEN AN INHERITENCE FROM THE RABIN GOVERNMENT. THIS WAS A PLOY THAT WOULD INCREASINGLY BE USED BY THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT IN TRYING TO CONVINCE THE U.S. THAT IT WAS NOT UNDERTAKING NEW SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY.

5. POLICY II -- "SETTLEMENTS IN DISGUISE." SHARON STARTED OFF SEPTEMBER BY APPEARING ON TELEVISION AND PRESENTING HIS IDEAS FOR A MASSIVE SETTLEMENT PROGRAM FOR THE WEST BANK. HOWEVER, OF GREATER EFFECT ON THE GOI WAS THE INCREASING GUSH CRITICISM OF BEGIN FOR DELAYS IN ESTABLISHING NEW SETTLEMENTS: THE GUSH TOOK THE INITIATIVE AND ASSERTED THAT IT WOULD SETTLE 12 NEW SITES BY THE END OF THE SUMMER--WITHOUT CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT--"SINCE BEGIN RECOGNIZED THE RIGHT OF JEWS TO SETTLE ANYWHERE IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA." BEGIN TRIED TO CONTROL THE GUSH BY CONVINCING ITS LEADERS TO TRUST HIM. HE ALSO IGNORED GUSH CRITICISM AND TRIED TO PLAY ON THEIR COMMON BELIEFS. MEANWHILE, DAYAN WAS IN THE U.S. TRYING TO WORK OUT A MODUS VIVENDI ON THE SETTLEMENT ISSUE WITH PRESIDENT CARTER. AS A RESULT OF THESE TALKS, DAYAN PROMISED THAT NEW SETTLEMENTS ON THE WEST BANK WOULD BE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF MILITARY CAMPS. MEANWHILE, BACK IN ISRAEL, THE GUSH AND BEGIN WERE LOCKED IN A CONFRONTATION. THE GUSH FELT IT WAS COMMITTED TO SETTLE AS PROMISED, EVEN WITHOUT GOI APPROVAL. BEGIN WAS TORN BY HIS IDEOLOGICAL AGREEMENT WITH THE TIGHT TO SETTLE, AVERSION TO USING FORCE AGAINST HIS FELLOW JEWS, AND HIS DETERMINATION TO UPHOLD GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY. IN

THE COURSE OF WHAT HE LATER TERMED ONE OF THE MOST
DIFFICULT MEETINGS OF HIS LIFE, BEGIN AGREED TO
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SEVERAL GUSH SETTLEMENTS IN
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MILITARY CAMPS BY THE END OF THE YEAR.

6. POLICY III -- "BULLDOZERS AWAY" PERSUADED BY
SHARON THAT A BUFFER ZONE OF SETTLEMENTS AND INTENSELY
CULTIVATED FIELDS WAS NECESSARY TO ISOLATE THE GAZA
STRIP, AND HOPING TO DEFUSE DOMESTIC CRITICISM OF THE
GOVERNMENT'S PEACE PROPOSALS, THE CABINET DECIDED IN LATE
DECEMBER TO APPROVE A CRASH SETTLEMENT PROGRAM FOR
THE RAFAH APPROACHES. SHARON ALSO TOOK THIS OPPORTUNITY
TO UNDERTAKE WIDESPREAD BULLDOZER WORK IN EASTERN SIANI.
THE BULLDOZERS WENT INTO ACTION ON JANUARY 4. UN-
EXPECTEDLY HEAVY MEDIA ATTENTION AND STRONG EGYPTIAN
AND INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM GAVE THE CABINET SECOND
THOUGHTS AND IT PUBLICLY STRESSED THAT IT WAS ONLY
"STRENGTHENING" AND "THICKENING" EXISTING SETTLEMENTS.
THE BULLDOZER WORK PETERED OUT AT THE END OF JANUARY
ALTHOUGH CONSTRUCTION AT THE PRIEL, KATIF B AND KATIF
C SITES ("ALREADY APPROVED BY THE RABIN GOVERNMENT")
CONTINUED. ALTHOUGH LIMITED IN TERMS OF ACTUAL OUT-
PUT, THIS BURST OF SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTED
TO POISONING THE ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING THE MEETING OF
THE ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN POLITICAL COMMITTEE IN MID-
JANUARY.

7. POLICY II (CONT.) -- "SETTLEMENTS IN DISGUISE."
IN DECEMBER SHARON AGAIN SUGGESTED A MASSIVE WEST
BANK SETTLEMENT PROGRAM TO COMPLEMENT HIS PLANS FOR THE
SINAI. HOWEVER, THE CABINET ADOPTED THE LESS AMBITIOUS
PROPOSAL OF ESTABLISHING ANOTHER FOUR NEW SETTLEMENTS
IN MILITARY CAMPS ON THE WEST BANK. THE DMC MINISTERS
THEREUPON DEMANDED, ON THE BASIS OF THEIR COALITION
AGREEMENT, THAT THE FINAL DECISION ON THESE SETTLEMENTS
BE MADE BY THE KNESSET SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE. ON JANUARY 10 THE COMMITTEE APPROVED THE
GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL TO SET UP THE FOUR NEW SETTLE-
MENTS. THERE WAS A TWIST UNDERLYING THIS GOVERNMENT
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DECISION SINCE THERE WAS NO MILITARY PRESENCE AT THESE
SITES (KARNEI SHOMRON, HARIS, TAPUAH AND SILT AZ ZAHAR)
PRIOR TO THE GOI DECISION TO SETTLE CIVILIANS THERE.

8. POLICY IV -- "SHILO: ARCHAEOLOGICAL SETTLEMENT."
IN EARLY JANUARY A GUSH GROUP SETTLED WITHOUT GOVERNMENT
APPROVAL AT SHILO ON THE WEST BANK. WEIZMAN WANTED TO
REMOVE THE SQUATTERS BY FORCE BUT DID NOT RECEIVE

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CABINET AUTHORIZATION. BEGIN TRIED TO DEFUSE THE
PROBLEM QUIETLY BY LETTING THE SETTLERS STAY AT THE SITE IN THE
GUISE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKERS. ACCEPTING
THE DEAL, THE SETTLERS THEN EMBARRASSED THE GOI WITH
A WIDELY-PUBLICIZED CORNERSTONE-LAYING CEREMONY. SINCE
THEN, REGARDLESS OF TAUNTS BY THE SETTLERS THAT THEY
HAVE ESTABLISHED A SETTLEMENT, THE GOI HAS TENACIOUSLY
CLUNG TO ITS COVER STORY THAT SHILO IS AN "ARCHAEOLOGICAL
CAMP."

9. POLICY V -- "THE FREEZE." IN MID-FEBURARY THE MINISTRY
OF DEFENSE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WEIZMAN, WITH CABINET

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APPROVAL, HAD FROZEN GROUND WORK IN SIANI. THE CABINET THEN DECIDED TO DEFER NEW SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY ENTIRELY UNTIL THE PRIME MINISTER HAD RETURNED FROM HIS MID-MARCH VISIT TO THE U.S. PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THIS CABINET DECISION, WEIZMAN ISSUED ORDERS PREVENTING THE KADESH BARNEA SETTLEMENT NUCLEUS FROM MOVING TO THEIR PERMANENT SITE IN SIANI AND DEVELOPMENT WORK AT BEIT EL AND NABI SALAH ON THE WEST BANK. WEIZMAN ALSO APPARENTLY INSTRUCTED THE MILITARY GOVERNOR OF THE TERRITORIES NOT TO ACT ON NEW SETTLEMENT PROPOSALS.

10. EIGHT MONTHS OF SHARPLY DIVERGENT SETTLEMENT DECISIONS HAVE LED MANY ISRAELI TO DOUBT THE CREDIBILITY IF NOT EFFICACY OF THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT. IT APPEARS TO MANY AS NEITHER STRONGER, MORE UNIFIED NOR MORE CAPABLE THAN THE LABOR GOVERNMENT WHICH PRECEDED IT. THE VIEW THAT PRE-OCCUPATION WITH SETTLEMENTS HELPED WRECK THE PROSPECTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATION WITH EGYPT HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY HEARD. CONSEQUENTLY, MANY ISRAELIS--EVEN WITHIN THE CABINET, LIKUD AND NRP--SUPPORT THE CURRENT FREEZE ON SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IN AN ATTEMPT TO WARD OFF A FURTHER DETERIORATION IN U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS AND RESURRECT THE HOPES OF THE EARLY DAYS OF THE SADAT INITIATIVE.

11. STANDARD BEARER WITHIN THE LAST TWO MONTHS FOR THIS PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO SETTLEMENTS HAS BEEN WEIZMAN. DETERMINED NOT TO LET A PRE-OCCUPATION WITH SETTLEMENTS DESTROY THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE WITH EGYPT, WEIZMAN SUCCEEDED IN HAVING THE CABINET ADOPT THE DECISION TO FREEZE SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY FOR THE TIME BEING. FURTHERMORE, WEIZMAN UTILIZED HIS CONTROL OF THE

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MILITARY GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT THE CABINET'S POLICY IS STRICTLY CARRIED OUT--AS DETERMINED BY HIM.

12. WEIZMAN PREPARED THE GROUND FOR HIS WASHINGTON VISIT BY PUBLICLY STATING ON MARCH 7 THAT THE GOI HAD DECIDED TO FREEZE NEW SETTLEMENTS FOR A TWO-THREE WEEK PERIOD UNTIL THE PRIME MINISTER'S RETURN FROM THE U.S. "AFTERWARDS, WE WILL DISCUSS WHAT TO DO NEXT." DESPITE THE PROLONGED CABINET WRANGLING LEADING TO THIS

DECISION AND WEIZMAN'S THREAT TO RESIGN IF THERE WAS ANY BACKSLIDING BY BEGIN, THE ISRAELI TEAM IN WASHINGTON IS LIKELY TO PRESENT A UNIFIED FRONT ON THE SETTLEMENT ISSUE. THEY WILL EXPECT THE U.S. TO APPRECIATE THE CONCESSION THE GOI HAS MADE AND PROBABLY DEMAND A QUID PRO QUO IF THE FREEZE IS TO BE MAINTAINED. A U.S. REITERATION OF ITS POSITION THAT SETTLEMENTS ARE ILLEGAL AND THAT A FREEZE IS IN ISRAELI INTERESTS IS LIKELY TO BE ANSWERED WITH AN ALLUSION TO IDEOLOGICAL AND DOMESTIC (RIGHT-WING) CONSTRAINTS ON LIKUD POLICY. HOWEVER, IF OUR READING OF THE ISRAELI MOOD IS ACCURATE, THE MOST EFFECTIVE AMMUNITION THE USG CAN OFFER WEIZMAN AND OTHER MODERATE MINISTERS IN THE CABINET TO CONTINUE TO PRESS FOR THE MAINTAINANCE OF THE FREEZE IS U.S. WILLINGNESS TO GO ALL OUT FOR A SPEEDY RESUMPTION OF THE DIRECT-EGYPTIAN TALKS.
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